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Hey Grandma

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Hey Grandma

Hey Grandma I

Hey Grandma, remember when you used to pull me onto your lap
and we would sing that song about remembering/
on the rocker.

We would sing and clap

'keep singing this song,' you said
and your heart will keep beating,

and if you always tell the truth
then you'll always be able to hear me,
in Wichita, Kansas.'

She sewed constellations into her dresses, and we turned years into shadows
and tears and blood, story after story coming into its whole'
rocking.

"How far away is Wichita, Grandma?"

"800 miles."

Hey Grandma,

I know its something other than 800 miles now,

but I'm in a lot of trouble,

and I need that song but I can't find it.

I am being truthful and waiting.

Please send it quick.

Hey Grandma II

Hey Grandma, you said

"Our people are a people who deny they are a people
who are a people who forgot they are a people
because they got greedy and wanted to be everything.'

rocking,

You said,

"A poem creeps around the edge of everybody's meanness
and gives them a view.'

Hey Grandma,

you grew turnips that looked like full moons,

and every time I came

you roasted a chicken

and we ate it for a month

and where you live the dirt was blue.

You would rub it into my hair and say,

'Now, you're clean.'

Hey Grandma III

She made her own flags and we came out
and spoke words to them,

'Good morning, green flower,'

'Good morning, flying snake.'

I told her I knew the song,
'My Country Tis of Thee,'
and she said

'That country tis of thee sweet land
of sugarcane, rot gut whisky, pie-in the-eye,
and we'll put you behind steel.

That country tis of thee, sweet land of blind mice
chasing a greenbacks tail while eating everybody else's cheese.'

She said,

"You are living in whiteface
and that is a stark and fierce and bony position,
being the only people whose stories say
they were kicked out of the garden.'

'But there is a bird inside of you
that knows you need a strong antidote,
a bird with wings as heavy as those steel bars,
as big as the prison industry,
a bird which sees that there is a need for strong flight, strong vision,
and a heart which can be real true and real hurt all at the same time.'

Some days she went out to sea,
on the Ethiopic Atlantic,
full as it is of skeletons and half-lived dreams.
The sun rose with the smell of salt and she would roll up a smoke and sing,
a dipping and dipping mass of motion,
her hands an octopus because of fingers missing,
dipping and dipping with a torn net.

"Why don't you fix it?" I asked.

She said, "I'm making sure they want to stay."

sarah addae